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Spy Charge Spurs Questions About Procedures of C.I.A.

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 7 — Members of the Senate and House intelligence committees say espionage allegations against a former Central Intelligence Agency officer raise serious questions about the agency's procedures for dealing with disgruntled employees.

The legislators say their committees are conducting a detailed examination of the career of Edward L. Howard, a former officer of the agency who, according to Administration officials, was identified by a defector as having sold the Soviet Union highly secret information.

Mr. Howard was forced to resign from the C.I.A. in 1983; the agency was dissatisfied with his answers in a polygraph, or lie detector, examination that was apparently unrelated to espionage charges. Officials have said they suspect it was a desire for revenge that led Mr. Howard, who is believed to have fled the country, to provide secrets to the Soviet Union.

"The C.I.A. has good security procedures but they're not perfect and they're going to have to get better," Senator Patrick J. Leahy, the Vermont Democrat who is the vice chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, said in an interview. "They're going to have to figure out what to do with a disgruntled or potentially disgruntled employee who has a lot of knowledge because that's where a lot of breaches have occurred in the past."

C.I.A. Briefs Committees

Representative Dave McCurdy of Oklahoma, the chairman of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Evaluation of the House Intelligence Committee, said: "I think there are a lot of questions yet to be answered. I'm not sure anyone's comfortable with what we've seen so far."

In an interview today, Mr. McCurdy would not discuss the specifics of the Howard case but said that he and some other members of the committee had been briefed by the C.I.A. Members of the Senate committee have had similar briefings by the agency.

According to members of the two committees and their aides, the panels are concerned about a broad range of issues stemming from the agency's handling of Mr. Howard, who was within the C.I.A.'s three-year probation period when he was asked to resign.

Questions Raised With C.I.A.

Among the questions the two committees are raising with the agency are these:

¶ Why was Mr. Howard, a junior official, given access to such sensitive material at an early stage in his career?

¶ Why did the agency choose to dismiss him while the information he had learned in training for a posting to Moscow was still of value?

¶ What steps were taken to keep track of Mr. Howard's movements after he left the C.I.A., both in this country and abroad, where the Federal Bureau of Investigation has charged that he met with Soviet intelligence agents?

¶ Was there sufficient coordination between the C.I.A. and the F.B.I., the other major Federal agency responsible for counterintelligence work?

Administration officials say Mr. Howard was identified as an agent of the Soviet Union by Vitaly Yurchenko, a senior official in the K.G.B., the Soviet intelligence agency. He defected to the West in July. Mr. Yurchenko, the officials have said, is undergoing extensive questioning at an undisclosed location in the United States.

• Trip to Austria in '84

Mr. Howard, who is now 33 years old, was employed by the Central Intelligence Agency from January 1981 to June 1983, according to an F.B.I. affidavit filed in Federal District Court in New Mexico. The document charged that he traveled to Austria in 1984 where he made contact with agent of the K.G.B. and was paid money for "classified information relating to U.S. intelligence sources and methods."

Intelligence sources say that the information involved related to American operations in Moscow. They have said Mr. Howard was trained for a post in Russia that would have involved managing agents or other means of intelligence collection.

Intelligence sources say, however, that he was not sent to Moscow and was instead asked to leave the agency after the polygraph test suggested use of illegal drugs and petty theft of Government funds.

Mr. Howard, who had been working for the New Mexico Legislature, disappeared last month after the F.B.I. questioned him. He is being sought on a fugitive warrant.